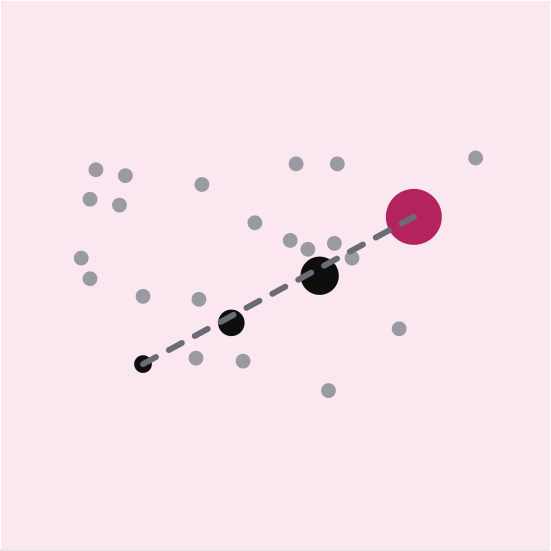
Concept

Weak signals

Early, imprecise hints of a change that is not yet evident but could come to have a large impact.



In Spanish
Señales débiles

Origin
Ansoff (1975)

What problem it addresses

Explains why many changes take us by surprise even though they could have been sensed earlier.

An example

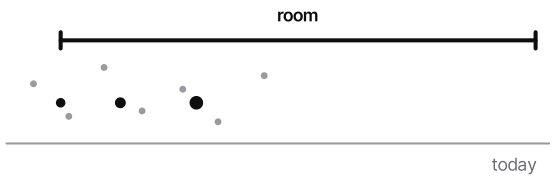
The same change, seen at two different moments.

When it is already a trend



Everyone talks about it and the data confirm it. **Little room.**

When it is a weak signal



A few odd cases, still ambiguous and easy to ignore. **More room.**

The sooner a change is detected, the more time there is to respond, even if there is less certainty.

Why it happens

1

Big changes often start with small, odd cases.

2

At first they are ambiguous and easy to dismiss as noise.

3

If you wait for clear evidence, by the time it arrives there is little room left.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Collect odd cases you come across (news, products, behaviors) and review them as a team every so often.

Avoid

Presenting an anecdote as if it were already a trend.

Don't fall for it

Do not dismiss something just because it is a minority today: note why it could grow.

1975

What the research says

Igor Ansoff proposed that strategic surprises are usually announced in advance by weak, imprecise information, and that it is better to start responding gradually instead of waiting for certainty (Ansoff, 1975).

●●○ **Debated evidence.** It is a strategic management framework, not an experimental result. Telling a weak signal from mere noise is still difficult.

Connections

Used in

- Horizon scanning
- Trend research
- Scenario planning
- Futures wheel

Authors and works

1975	**H. Igor Ansoff**	Introduced the idea of detecting weak signals and responding to them gradually.

Sources

Original sources

- Ansoff, H. I. (1975). Managing strategic surprise by response to weak signals. California Management Review, 18(2), 21–33. View source (https://doi.org/10.2307/41164635)

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